

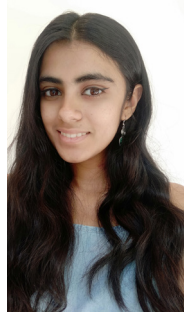
# TRACING NOSTALGIA

**Step into Yelahanka's past with an interactive exhibition, spotlighting the suburb's forgotten landmarks through a blend of art and community memories**



Bindu Gopal Rao

Nostalgia is a powerful emotion. And when expressed through art, it invariably takes an all-new dimension. Merging these two aspects, independent visual artist Lakshmi Nagaraj has strived to capture the lost memories of Yelahanka, a bustling suburb in North Bangalore through an interactive art exhibition.



Lakshmi Nagaraj

The exhibition, titled, "Mapping Memories: The Lost Establishments of Yelahanka" - is organised in a public ground, amidst a key market area in Yelahanka New Town - a venue carefully chosen to ensure easy access to all. "I've always wanted to do a community engagement project - because I believe strongly in community; the impact art has on community and vice versa," says the artist, who has lived in Yelahanka for over 20 years, thus making the place an ideal choice for her exhibition.

For the show, Nagaraj has collaborated with the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) to capture the "lost memories" of Yelahanka's residents. To begin with, she put out an open call to the residents of the suburb and spoke to over 30 of them. "I conducted 'memory mapping' sessions where the participants were encouraged to remember their favourite spots and mark them on a physical map of Yelahanka New Town. This was meant to get them to describe spaces that don't exist anymore so that I could paint them. The simple act of slowing down, remembering, and exploring the residents' relationship with these spaces served a greater goal," says Nagaraj.

Yelahanka was a natural choice for the artist to capture in an exhibition, as it gave her the opportunity to explore her own relationship with the neighbourhood. She also adds that the neighbourhood is often an overlooked



part of the cityscape. "The thought of these spaces being wiped out from collective consciousness and forgotten forever made me uncomfortable, and so I wanted to etch them into history. Through this exhibition, I have explored and documented spaces and establishments of Yelahanka New Town, purely through residents' memories of them. This means that while this project is about our public spaces, it is equally about the people who occupy them," she notes.

## Memory map

The main installation is a large-scale, collective memory map of Yelahanka New Town with paintings placed in the corresponding locations where the residents' memories took place. In addition to this, individual memory maps and drawings from all participants too occupy spaces in the exhibition.

"There is also an interactive element - a 'build-a-painting' station, where visitors can engage in a creative activity. I came across IFA's 'Project 560 - Neighbourhood Engagements', a very specific call for projects that engage with one neighbourhood in Bangalore and that gave me the perfect opportunity, prompting me to build an exhibition that has its foundation in community engagement," says Nagaraj.

"We are excited to engage with Nagaraj's project. The Neighbourhood Engagements under Project 560 at IFA seeks to connect residents of Bangalore with the stories and experiences of diverse communities that make up our city. Lakshmi in her project explores her locale of Yelahanka New Town, and we join her in inviting you to visit and engage with spaces, memories, and stories of this unique neighbourhood in North Bangalore," says Menaka Rodriguez, Executive Director at IFA.

There is another, smaller stand where the individual memory

maps of each participant are displayed, showing their favourite spots. Participants have used sticker stars, pens, pencils, and sketch pens to mark their favourite spots. These are both current spaces and past ones. Some participants have also drawn things on the map and stuck keepsakes that they associate with their memories there.

## The art work

The key installation is a large-scale map of Yelahanka, measuring 7x13ft, along with about 25-30 paintings of size 5x7 inches. Some spaces have been described by multiple people and these have been captured through a single painting that includes more

Mapping Memories:  
The Lost Spaces of Yelahanka  
by Lakshmi Nagaraj



**While this exhibition is an exercise to delve into nostalgia for the residents of Yelahanka New Town, it is also a critical exploration of their collective memory - the role public spaces play in all human lives, and who gets to occupy them**



layers than others. Nagaraj has also painted some of her own memories.

"I had a clear vision for the paintings from the beginning - all of them would be created on translucent materials. This was an opportunity for me to push my boundaries and experiment with different materials that I hadn't tried before. For instance, after experimenting with butter paper, tulle, glass, bubble wrap and florist paper, I finally zeroed down on tracing paper. Each final painting is made with acrylic markers on tracing paper. Each painting consists of two or more pieces of tracing paper that are layered on top of the other. The layers come together to form the whole painting. In this format, the bottom-most layer gets dulled down while the one at the top is the sharpest. This effect is also a metaphor for fading memory," she says.

Each painting is placed on top of a photograph of the spot as it exists today. This has been done to juxtapose the past and present, she says. The photograph can be

seen through the paintings faintly, but the audience is also encouraged to flip through the layers. The mapping sessions took Nagaraj about two to three months and once she zeroed in on the format, "the paintings took me about a month to make," she adds.

## Community calling

Nagaraj admits that she was drawn to create this exhibition because she wanted to document memories that, if not recorded now, might be lost forever. "My research focuses not on hard, cold facts about these spaces and establishments, but on what they meant to the residents. Essentially, through this exhibition, I aimed to explore the myriad feelings people have towards places that once held significance for them but no longer exist or have changed beyond recognition," she says.

While this exhibition is an exercise to delve into nostalgia for the residents of Yelahanka New Town, it is also a critical exploration of their collective memory - the role public spaces play in all human lives, and who gets to occupy them.

"I believe that these spaces, no matter how small or for how short a period they existed, deserve to be remembered. Even if they hold significance for just one person, they are special and valuable. Transforming memories of these spaces into paintings was my way of making them tangible, allowing them to live on a bit longer. Individual memories fade, but we can pass them on for others to remember - in this case, through paintings. The spaces might be lost, but they shouldn't be forgotten," she signs off.

When: 3rd & 4th August,  
11am - 8pm

Where: Opp. State Public Library,  
Yelahanka New Town

